

Planning to Parent, Day 3: Am I Qualified?

Grades 9 and 10, Lesson #18

Time Needed

one class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Describe at least 3 qualifications he or she believes are important for the job of “parent.”
2. Recognize that people have differing beliefs about which qualifications are important.

Agenda

1. Explain the lesson’s purpose and relevance.
2. Hand out and read aloud the Worksheet “*Possible Qualifications for the Job of Parent.*”
3. Use small groups, functioning as boards of directors for adoption agencies, to elicit from students their minimum standards for the job of **parent**.
4. Have individuals and pairs, thinking as birth parents; examine their beliefs about the ideal qualifications for the role of parent.
5. Discuss, summarize the lesson’s concepts and assign homework.

Materials Needed

Six to eight per class period of:

large sheets of easel paper
marking pens

One stick-on nametag per student, partially filled-out in advance (see activity 3, on page 18-3)

One copy per student of:

Parent Worksheet
Family/Individual Homework Exercise

Eight copies per class of:

Small Group Instructions

Activities

1. Explain the lesson's purpose and relevance:

If you were choosing a hairdresser or barber, you wouldn't just go to the first one in the phone book. You would have some criteria, things you'd look for in choosing the best person for the job. Give me some examples of things you'd look for.

If you were hiring someone to clean your house, you wouldn't just offer the job to the first one you ran across in the phone book. You would have some criteria, things you'd look for in choosing the best person for the job. Give me some examples of things you'd look for.

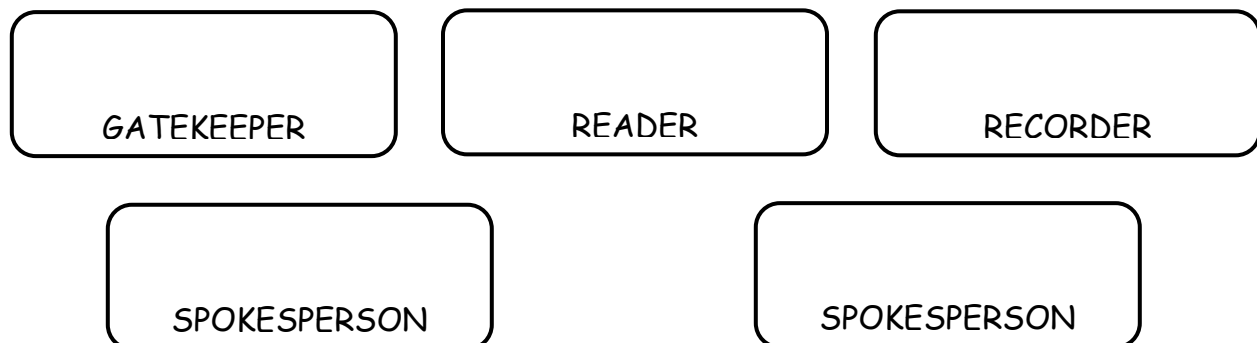
*There is **one** job that has more responsibility and commitment than a hairdresser, barber or housecleaner and yet almost **anybody** who wants to is allowed to do! (This does not mean that hairdressers, barbers or housecleaners are not important!) Nobody checks people's qualifications. It happens to be one of the most important jobs in the world. No, it's not President of the United States. It is "Parent." Today we'll examine the qualifications for the job. We'll look at who **should** be "hired" as parents.*

2. Hand out the *Planning-To-Parent Worksheet: Possible Qualifications for the Job of "Parent."* Have volunteers read it aloud, but make sure everyone knows **not** to fill it out yet.
3. Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Explain to them:

Each group is the Board of Directors of a different adoption agency. Each Board of Directors needs:

- (1.) a **Reader** (who will read the "Small Group Instructions" aloud to the group, reading a new task each time they finish a task),
- (2.) a **Recorder** (who will write down the group's decisions),
- (3.) a **Gatekeeper** (whose job it will be to see that everyone in the group gets a chance to speak), and
- (4.) one or two **Spokespersons**, who will report back to the whole class what their small group discussed.

Write these job titles in the middle of the blackboard and allow the groups 2 minutes to make their selections. Then give each group the correct number of stick-on nametags, on which you have already written the titles ... all they have to add are their own first names. Thus, a small group will start, for example, with these:



and end up with these:

Jason
GATEKEEPER

Jyrone
READER

Anita
RECORDER

Jennifer
SPOKESPERSON

Hector
SPOKESPERSON

Give each group,

- 1) one set of Small Group Instructions and,
- 2) a large sheet of paper and a marking pen.

Remind the *Reader* to read only one instruction aloud at a time. When that task is finished, he or she will read the next instruction. Allow the groups six or eight minutes altogether for discussion and some consensus. Clarify that unanimity on all points is neither expected, possible, nor desirable.

After six to eight minutes call “time”. Have the spokespersons report on their groups’ decisions (explaining, too, any **differences** of opinion or commenting on how they reached **consensus**, if they did).

Raise one or more of these questions for a brief discussion:

If your group said that “no history of alcohol or other drug problems” was a minimum qualification, what does that mean if a person has been sober and straight for the last six years and is active in AA? Are they ineligible to adopt through your agency? If you would make exceptions, who would get them?

If you listed “no police record,” what exactly ought to disqualify a person? What if they shoplifted last year,? What if it was ten years ago? What if the crime was assault?

If you ruled out people with physical disabilities, what about a paraplegic who goes camping, drives his or her own van, and loves kids? Would they be eligible to adopt through you? Why or why not?

Summarize what students have said.

4. For the next part of the lesson, have people decide whether to ‘work alone or with a partner. They will use the *Planning-To-Parent Worksheet: Possible Qualifications for the job of “Parent”*. Explain:

Instead of working for an adoption agency, now imagine that you are birth parents: young men and women who are expecting babies within the next few weeks, or who have a baby less than a year old.

Suppose you have decided that the most loving thing you can do for your baby is to release it for adoption. You have decided on “open adoption” — which means you’ll go to an agency where you can choose your baby’s family. You’ll be shown files describing many of the families the agency has approved. You will have to decide which family is “best” for your baby.

You can assume that the agency has already screened out any families who didn’t meet your small group’s “minimum – triple-star-criteria.” As you read various families’ files, what will you look for?

*On your Planning-To-Parent Worksheet, put a **single** star next to each item that **matters** to you ... each thing you would like to find in an adoptive family for your baby.*

*You can **double** star up to four items that matter a lot.*

*And put an **X** next to each factor that **doesn’t matter** to you, that has nothing to do with being a good parent in your opinion ... or just isn’t very important. You will not have to share all that you have written, if a particular belief feels too private.*

After about ten minutes, offer that volunteers may share their answers, if you have time.

5. Summarize the lesson’s concepts (these questions are not to be answered aloud, just to provoke thought):

Not everybody is cut out to be a parent.

Are you? If you were choosing parents, would you choose yourself? If you don’t feel you’re qualified to be a good parent now, when do you think you will be? How will you know when you’ll be ready?

Only you know yourself well enough to figure that out. Think about it tonight. Think about it again every few years. Remember that being a parent is one of the most important jobs in the world. Babies deserve families that truly want them and are ready for them.

Homework

A Trip to the Planet Seibabon (“no babies” backwards) can be used by a student as either an individual or a family assignment.

Small Group Instructions

Your agency will have 25 infants to place in adoptive families this year. About 1,000 families will apply to adopt these infants, so only a few will actually get to adopt. Your staff will be interviewing all 1,000 families ... and deciding which families to approve ... which are "best" for the babies whose futures you hold in your hands. Only the families your staff approves will be listed for birth parents to choose from.

REMEMBER TO SHOW RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

What are the minimum qualifications you want your staff to look for? Talk it over with the rest of your "staff."

1. ON THE LARGE PAPER, WITH MARKING PEN, BRAINSTORM AS A GROUP, THE QUALIFICATIONS THAT ANYONE IN YOUR GROUP THINKS SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF EVERY ADOPTIVE FAMILY.

2. NOW, EACH OF YOU, PUT A STAR NEXT TO WHICHEVER ITEMS THINK OUGHT TO BE REQUIRED.

So, some items may only get one star ... if one of you wants to require them. Other items will get two stars, and so forth. Talk about it. Try to convince one another. Only items that get at least three stars will be required of every family that wants to adopt a baby from your agency.

3. EACH OF YOU, ON YOUR OWN PAPER, PUT THREE STARS NEXT TO ANY ITEM THAT GOT 3 OR MORE VOTES BY YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

Family or Individual Homework Exercise: A Trip to the Planet Seibabon

DIRECTIONS: You have two options...

To do this as an **individual homework exercise**, read the story below.

Then write, make a tape or CD, of your advice to the committee.

IF YOU DO THIS, IT'S DUE: _____

If you prefer to do this as a **family homework exercise**, read and discuss the story.

Then, turn in the confirmation slip.

IF YOU DO THIS, IT'S DUE: _____

THE STORY:

*Hop in your Time-space ship ... buckle your seatbelt ... please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices ... prepare for take-off .. .10 - 9 -8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 ... zzzzzzplat ... WELCOME TO THE YEAR 2688, AND THE PLANET **SEIBABON**.*

Seibabon is a planet very much like the planet Earth of the 21st Century. In fact, it is populated by humans whose ancestors lived on the planet Earth! It is exactly like Earth in all respects but one: the air has a contraceptive effect on all human inhabitants, male and female. It allows neither sperm nor eggs to mature.

As a result, ever since the planet was colonized, centuries ago, Seibabonites have had to "vacation" on Earth in order to have babies. (Of course, you can't stay on Earth too long; the pollution will kill you.) Since they've had to travel so far to reproduce, only the very rich, and people with connections, have been able to afford to have more than one or, at most, two children.

Just last week however, the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) of Seibabon approved a new prescription drug ... an antidote to the contraceptive effects of the atmosphere, the tasty new drug is called "Fertility Achievement Medicine In Lemon Yogurt" ("FAMILY" for short). The FDA has established a Reproduction Ethics Committee to decide who will be allowed to use the drug. (It will be in limited supply for a decade or more.)

The Committee has contacted you. It is said that you are a time traveler ... from the 21st Century, a time when, they say, anybody who wanted to ... and even people who didn't want to ... could have babies! The Committee wants your advice.

CONSIDER:

How do you think the Committee should decide who gets the antidote and the ability to have a child?

Should there just be a lottery? Why or why not?

If not, which applicants should be allowed to have children? Who should be turned down?

If you lived on Seibabon, would you be allowed to have children, according to your criteria?

What are the minimum qualifications, in your opinion, for the job of “parent”? What are the ideal qualifications?

FINALLY, ANSWER THIS AS A PARENT, IF YOU ARE ONE OR AS A POTENTIAL PARENT, IF YOU ARE NOT ONE AT THIS TIME:

What are your strengths and weaknesses (at this time in your life) as a parent?

Planning-To-Parent Worksheet: Possible Qualifications for the Job of "Parent"

*Below on this page and the next two pages are some possible qualifications for parenting. Each one is important to somebody. That doesn't mean each one is important to you. They have been listed in random order ... not in order of importance, because each person will believe in a different order. Think about **what you believe**. Feel free to add your own criteria in the blanks or on the back.*

A. CULTURE, RACE, RELIGION, BELIEFS, for example:

- 1. shares my beliefs about rules, bedtimes, etc., for example:
 - believes in firm limit-setting
 - believes in strict discipline
 - believes in spontaneity and not-so-rigid-limits
- 2. believes in the importance of hard work
- 3. believes in the importance of looking good, stylish, fit
- 4. shares my religious, moral beliefs, for example:
 - believes a child needs a clear, solid religious foundation
 - believes a child should be exposed to various faiths and choose his/her own
- 5. shares the baby's culture and or ethnic background
- 6. is the same race (or racial mix) that the baby is
- 7. is open-minded (has friends of different races, religions, cultures, etc.)
- 8. _____

B. NO HISTORY OF SERIOUS TROUBLE WITH THE LAW, for example:

- 1. has no police record
- 2. has no history of domestic violence
- 3. has no history of sexual assault
- 4. has no history as a child abuser (sexual, physical, emotional)
- 5. _____

C. ENOUGH MONEY AND OTHER RESOURCES, for example:

- 1. has a steady income of at least \$20,000/year
- 2. has a steady income of at least \$40,000/year and owns a car
- 3. has a steady income of at least \$60,000/year and owns a home and a car
- 4. _____

D. STRONG RELATIONSHIP AND SUPPORT SYSTEM, for example:

- ___ 1. stable family, for example:
 - married for at least three years
 - if single, has lived in one town or neighborhood at least three years
 - if gay or lesbian, have been a couple at least three years
 - has another child or children already
 - other evidence of stability you would accept or prefer:
- ___ 2. _____
has extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles)
- ___ 3. has a supportive circle of friends
- ___ 4. _____

E. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH AND ABILITY, for example:

- ___ 1. no illness or physical disability
- ___ 2. if ill or disabled, has considered how child would be cared for
- ___ 3. no history of mental illness
- ___ 4. no history of alcohol or other drug problems
- ___ 5. no evidence of current emotional problems
- ___ 6. is intelligent
- ___ 7. works out regularly, believes in physical fitness
- ___ 8. _____

F. PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL SITUATION, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PLANS, for example:

- ___ 1. has a full life with many interests, wouldn't need child to be center of world, would model independence
- ___ 2. enjoys home, would have a family-centered life, would model family Interdependence
- ___ 3. is active in the community (volunteers, votes, would join PTA, coach a team)
- ___ 4. has enough time for a child, for example:
 - one stay-at-home parent
 - parent(s) work outside the home, but at least one gets home fairly early and would take family vacations
- ___ 5. has enough education, for example:
 - at least finished high school
 - at least 2 years of college
 - at least 4 years of college
- ___ 6. _____

G. PARENTING SKILLS, INTERESTS, for example:

- 1. likes infants a lot
- 2. likes toddlers a lot
- 3. likes young children a lot
- 4. likes teens a lot
- 5. enjoys playing, silliness, roughhousing, doesn't take self too seriously
- 6. enjoys serious discussion, would explain the world, would encourage a child's questions
- 7. respects kids as people, would listen to them
- 8. enjoys reading
- 9. enjoys reading
- 10. enjoys camping or other outdoor recreation or sports
- 11. enjoys fix-up, carpentry, home-repair puttering
- 12. _____

H. RIGHT (BEST) AGE, PERSONALITY AND MATURITY, for example:

- 1. teens or early twenties
- 2. late twenties
- 3. thirties
- 4. has mastered many adult skills (held down a job, purchased an appliance, shopped for health insurance, balanced a checkbook, etc.)
- 5. has good self-esteem, is confident
- 6. has a lot of patience, flexibility
- 7. is mature enough to put a child's needs first much of the time
- 8. _____